

Talbot County Tourism Board
Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, October 9, 2019
8:30 a.m.
215 Bay Street, Conference Room #1, Easton, MD 21601

I. Call to Order

Chairperson Judy Bixler called the meeting to order at 8:33 a.m.

Board Members Present: Judy Bixler, Angela Eade, Harold Klinger, Kelley Cox, Laura Price, Mark Salter, Jeff Schneider, Al Silverstein, Kim Weller, Cassandra Vanhooser

Board Members Absent: John Booth, Ian Fleming, Ben Simons

Recording Secretary: Candace Harris

II. Approval of Minutes

Minutes from the May meeting were presented. Al Silverstein moved that the minutes be accepted with any necessary corrections. Jeff Schneider seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

III. Old Business

Since the Board had not met since May 2019, Ms. Vanhooser presented a summary of the projects that the Tourism team worked on during the summer months.

The Hill Community Project – Tourism Deliverables: This project has been years in the making. Ms. Vanhooser teamed with the researcher to write a 32-page brochure that contains a self-guided tour of The Hill Community. In addition to the brochures, the project team created banners that are hanging around town and have submitted a suggested banner plan to the Town of Easton. We have requested that they hand in February for Black History Month, June for Juneteenth, and September for Frederick Douglass Day. The team also produced a cast-aluminum historical marker that will go on the Easton Rail Trail property on Dover Street. The sign was approved by the Easton Town Council and the Historic District Commission. Further, a mobile-responsive website has been developed and is almost ready to launch. This project was funded by an MHAA grant. Ms. Vanhooser feels it will be a big win for Easton and Talbot County.

Frederick Douglass Park on the Tuckahoe: The Frederick Douglass Park Committee has hired a consultant to do a small interpretive element for the park, which will be

installed to orient visitors to the park now. The Committee has also hired LSG Landscape Architects of Tyson Corner to do the master plan and interpretive plan. We just had our site visit last week. This “dream team” includes nationally renowned African American architect Michael Marshall and Mark Burchick, an environmentalist who is an authority on the Tuckahoe region. The first public meeting will be held on November 2 at the park.

Ms. Vanhooser and her colleagues Andy Hollis and Preston Peper worked with the County Council to submit a letter of support for a feasibility study for a Frederick Douglass Rail Trail from Easton to the town of Queen Anne’s County, connecting Easton to the Frederick Douglass Park on the Tuckahoe. Economic Development and Tourism is also working on a Civil War Trails sign to be installed at Covey’s Landing and working with Caroline County to reimagine the sign at Hillsboro. Ms. Vanhooser and Mr. Shoge are also working closely with the Planning and Zoning Department to complete a master plan for the village of Cordova. This document will determine what land uses are allowed in Cordova. There is another public meeting in November.

IPW: Ms. Vanhooser attended IPW, the country’s premier international travel trade show, with partners from the state of Maryland, the state of Virginia, and Washington, D.C. Some 7,500 people come from around the world to attend this show, which was held in D.C. two years ago. There is still a lot of interest in Maryland and the Great Chesapeake Bay Loop, which includes Talbot County, from this market. Ms. Vanhooser noted that she made a three-year commitment to this initiative with the goal of increasing the number of international visitors. Talbot County will continue to work with the State of Maryland to assess the effectiveness of this effort.

Plein Air Easton: Talbot County Economic Development and Tourism continues to be involved with Plein Air Easton and helps sponsor the annual farm-to-table dinner for the artists. The department also is the managing entity along with the Avalon Foundation for the ag-themed plein air painting collection. Thanks to a local donor who gave \$30,000 over three years to purchase art, four paintings were added to the collection this year, bringing the total number of paintings in the collection to eight. That collection is now hanging at the ESLC and will move the ESLC’s annual fundraiser, The Party to Preserve. It will hang in the Talbot County Free Library for the remainder of the month of October and then move to the Bradley Meeting Room in the Talbot County Courthouse. Though attendance was down, Plein Air Easton garnered record sales in 2019. Ms. Vanhooser continues to provide technical assistance for their marketing efforts.

Certified Interpretive Guides: Ms. Vanhooser and Mr. Shoge are working with Chesapeake College to get some Certified Interpretive Guide training. The County can use more step-on guides. Kelley has some experience in this area and hopefully can be involved in the conversations moving forward. ABA will be in Baltimore in two years, and we are all required as part of marketing grant to help support that effort. We will be

running FAM tours through the Easton Shore as part of this so we want to continue to put effort in product development as well as marketing.

Interpretive Panels and Murals: The department provides technical assistance to many organizations. Ms. Vanhooser provided direction and editing services for the Tilghman Watermen's Museum on their outdoors interpretive panel. She attended a ribbon cutting on August 23 for that sign. This is important because if you go to the Watermen's Museum and they are not open, the interpretive panel helps you understand the story they are trying to tell inside the museum. This also qualifies them for a Tourism Area Corridor (TAC) sign from State Highway. Ms. Vanhooser believes all of the small museums should have interpretive panels.

Ms. Vanhooser said that she is providing technical assistance to a group in Tilghman Island who wants to do a mural on the drawbridge. She has also visited with Ms. Cox, who is planning a mural at Phillips Wharf. The John Wesley Church in Oxford is also planning to add interpretive panels as part of their site plan. We are continuing to work on interpretive panels for Bellevue and Trappe and are trying to get Trappe added to the Stories of the Chesapeake Heritage Area so they can qualify for grants.

Waterfowl Festival: Ms. Vanhooser is working with the Waterfowl Festival on a press trip this year. Six journalists who have committed, and Ms. Vanhooser is holding out hope that CBS this morning will also attend. We are putting together a great itinerary that includes Easton, St. Michaels, Oxford and Tilghman Island.

IV. New Business

Visitors Center: Ms. Vanhooser reported that the person who works at the Visitors Center on Saturday is terminally ill and has resigned her position. She is recommending that we close on Saturdays in January, February, and March because we do not have the traffic. We will reevaluate staffing at this time.

Mr. Klinger said since the city of Easton is benefiting from the visitors on Saturday, maybe the Easton could use some of their accommodations tax to pay for a part-time person for the Visitors Center. Mr. Silverstein said that is a question for the mayor.

Ms. Vanhooser said that she plans to speak with the mayor about the center. Mr. Silverstein asked about the kiosk having tourism information, but Ms. Vanhooser noted that it will only have Easton tourism information. Ms. Price asked if there is a place to have rack cards for the whole county that someone could pick up if the Visitors Center is closed, such as the Avalon Theater. Ms. Vanhooser believes that we need to strategize about a long-term solution for the Visitors Center as we are currently not ideally positioned.

to be Talbot County's Visitors Center. The staff will continue to work weekends through the end of the year, and the Visitors Center will be closed in the first quarter of the year.

Short-Term Rentals: Ms. Vanhooser presented a letter she and Ms. Bixler drafted to address the issue of short-term rentals in Talbot County. The letter urges the County Council to form a task force to find a solution that balances the needs of short-term rental owners with those of county residents. Ms. Eade moved that Ms. Bixler submit the letter to the County Council; Mr. Klinger seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

- V. **Adjournment:** The meeting adjourned at 9:38 a.m. The next meeting will be held on November 13 at 8:30 a.m.